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ABSTRACT

Pupils may well enjoy studying and writing poetry if quality methods of teaching are used. A student teacher taught a unit of study on the writing of poetry to a class of sixth grade pupils who had previously shown no interest in poetry. Active involvement by learners was stressed throughout the unit. Student interest was piqued with a bulletin board of four poets and samples of their poems, oral reading of several poems by Robert Louis Stevenson by the student teacher, an active discussion on his life, and the student teacher's recitation from memory of his poem "My Shadow." Two students volunteered to memorize the poem and recited it the next day, with other students drawing pictures of their responses as they listened. Students indicated an interest in writing rhymed verse, so the class studied and wrote quatrains. One class member's mother, a published poet, came to class and spoke. Thus, students experienced a rich, exciting unit on poetry. (SR)

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POETRY IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL

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Pupils may well enjoy studying and writing poetry if quality methods of teaching are in evidence. A student -teacher (ST) supervised by the writer taught a unit of study on "the Writing of Poetry" to sixth grade pupils. The cooperating teacher (CT) had previously mentioned that her pupils for some reason did not like to listen to or read poems. Writing poetry did not generate any additional interests in this area. The ST wrote a detailed teaching unit on poetry writing. The objectives were very clearly spelled out in terms of intentions of instruction. Her main goal was to develop within pupils a desire to appreciate and create poems.

An excellent bulletin board of four illustrated poets and a sample of their poems appeared underneath each picture. The first pictured poet was Robert Louis Stevenson. The ST discussed with learners selected interesting items about the life and times of this poet. Most pupils associated Robert Louis Stevenson with the writing of prose such as "Treasure Island" and "Kidnapped." Stevenson's 'a Child's Garden of Verses,' placed on an interest center, was connected with a piece of red yarn with his picture on the bulletin board. The ST read several poems from this book to pupils using eye contact and voice inflection (stress and pitch). Leaners seemingly followed the oral reading carefully.

Pupils were surprised to learn that the author had a life-span of only forty-four years. From a previous study of historical units, pupils discussed what life must have been like in Stevenson's day. The period of time covered 1850-1894 emphasized the pre-Civil War days through the years leading up to the Spanish-American war. Stevenson had grave health problems throughout his life-time. He suffered from tuberculosis rather continuously. Learners with ST guidance talked about causes of the disease and why very little is heard of it today. With forty-four years as a life-time coupled with major difficulties in health, "Stevenson really accomplished much," was voiced by several pupils. One pupil

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mentioned that his father was forty-four years old and had never missed a day of work as an accountant. Six pupils had great grandparents living who were in their nineties. The ST did very little talking as pupils discussed living longer and healthier lives for most Americans presently than ever before. When the ST stated that Robert Louis Stevenson was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, one pupil said she had lived there last year; her father had been on leave of absence from the local university to study in Scotland. Several pupils asked questions of her dealing with going to school in Scotland. The ST felt that she would not have an opportunity to read to and discuss with pupils further writings of poetry written by Stevenson due to intense interest of learners toward the biography of Stevenson.

A pupil in sequence asked which poem the ST liked best of those written by Stevenson. The ST explained that "My Shadow" was her favorite poem. The ST recited the entire poem by memory. She had volunteered to do the memorizing on her own when being a sixth grade pupil in school. Two pupils volunteered also to memorize the poem since they enjoyed the words and content therein. Both said the poem orally with no clues to the rest of the students that next day. Enthusiasm and excitement were two words that described the recitation of the poem.

Pupils were given a sheet of paper to draw thereon, using pencil-sketching, pertaining to what they saw as they listened to "My Shadow". Most of the class were on task almost immediately on their own volition. Pupils told about their drawings to the rest of the class. Those who wished to refrain from doing so could. Only two did not wish to share their pencil- sketch with others initially. However, as time went on, these learners shared due to the high rate of motivation in the classroom.

By this time, pupils wanted to write selected kinds of verse. They had written couplets, triplets, and limericks previously. They indicated a continued interest in wanting to write rhymed verse. The ST read a poem she had composed that had four lines of rhyme called a quatrain. The poem read was the following;

The Clouds

Floating rapidly in the sky
Like an eagle in a pie
I see a bed of roses
that look like garden hoses.

The ST discussed with learners what made for a quatrain. In this case, lines one and two rhyme whereas lines three and four rhyme. The ST had placed neat, attractive pictures in a small box from which learners might choose one to write about in developing a quatrain. Three learners wished to write on topics other than that contained in the illustrations in the box. One pupil wrote the following;

LOST
I walked up a hill
to find a window sill
It was not to be found
on the dry mound.

Two pupils in a committee wrote;

WOUNDED
A dog is a friend
that is on the mend
After being hit by a car
when running near a bar.

The class as a whole wrote the following quatrain;

WRITING
We like to write poems that rhyme.
These can be finished in good time.
Once these poems are finished,
The time is almost diminished.

One class member's mother wrote poetry for publication. She was asked to come to class and tell about her experiences. The mother stressed the following as being important when writing poetry;

1.Choose topics to write abut that interest the personal self.

2.Do not worry abut time limits when writing poetry. Ideas do not come within a specific time limit.

3.Poetry written can be rhymed or unrhymed. Poems based on syllabication may also be fascinating to write such as haiku and tanka.

4.Free verse is very commonly written by poets whereby no rhyme nor syllabication is in evidence.

5.Do not give up in writing and completing poetry. Poets tend to persevere in the writing of poems.

6.Both men and women are poets. There are poets who are alive presently as well as those who have died. (Yesterday, a pupil had expressed the idea that some people feel poets who are no longer living, alone, can be considered as being professional writers of poetry).

7.Uniqueness, novelty, and originality are key concepts to emphasize in the writing of poetry. Excellent examples were given here.

8.Metaphors, similes, alliteration, and onomatopoeia are devices used by poets in writing poetry. These were illustrated by the speaker and resource person.

9.Famous poets may not be recognized during their lifetime.

10.Poetry may be written on any topic or subject matter.

The guest poet read several poems she had written. A rich, exciting unit on poetry was being experienced by pupils. Attention deficits were definitely not in evidence. Active involvement by learners in the unit was emphasized throughout the curriculum in teaching-learning situations.

In Closing

Students need to experience a challenging language arts curriculum involving the writing of poetry. Any nation and society needs creative beings. Progress and leadership come from creative efforts and endeavors of motivated persons. Poetry writing may provide those traits which aid individuals to trust their own thoughts, ideas, and endeavors to change, improve, and reform society. Appreciation of poetry by all learners is a must in general education.